MISCONDUCT AS A BEHAVIOURAL DRIVER OF PUBLIC SERVICE INEFFICIENCY: EVIDENCE FROM MALDIVIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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Abstract. Public service inefficiency remains a persistent governance challenge despite extensive administrative reforms aimed at improving accountability, performance, and service delivery. While inefficiency has traditionally been explained through structural and managerial deficiencies, growing scholarship suggests that behavioural factors play an equally important role in shaping organisational performance. This study examines how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. The findings reveal that misconduct translates into inefficiency through multiple interconnected pathways, including workflow disruption, administrative bottlenecks, resource leakage, supervisory overload, organisational fragmentation, employee disengagement, weak accountability, and erosion of institutional trust. The study further demonstrates that misconduct is sustained by relational governance, politicisation, inconsistent disciplinary enforcement, and perceived organisational injustice, which collectively weaken organisational performance and service delivery. Theoretically, the study contributes to public administration scholarship by conceptualising misconduct not merely as an ethical or legal problem but as a behavioural governance mechanism that systematically produces inefficiency. Empirically, it provides evidence from a Small Island Developing State, a context that remains underrepresented in governance research. The study concludes that efforts to improve public service efficiency must extend beyond structural reforms and address the behavioural, institutional, and cultural conditions that sustain misconduct within public administration.

Keywords: *public service misconduct, behavioural governance, civil service, Maldives, organisational justice, Small Island Developing States (SIDS)*

Introduction

Public service efficiency is widely recognised as a fundamental indicator of governance quality, institutional effectiveness, and state legitimacy. Governments are expected to transform public resources into timely, equitable, and high-quality services while maintaining accountability, transparency, and public trust (OECD, 2024; Brezzi et al., 2021). Consequently, public service inefficiency remains a major concern for policymakers and scholars because inefficiency undermines organisational performance, weakens citizen confidence, and reduces the capacity of public institutions to achieve policy objectives (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Traditional public administration scholarship has largely explained inefficiency through structural and managerial deficiencies such as bureaucratic rigidity, procedural complexity, inadequate coordination, resource constraints, and weak organisational design. During the New Public Management (NPM) era, reforms focused on improving efficiency through performance management, decentralisation, managerial autonomy, and results-based accountability systems (Hood, 1991). Although these reforms introduced important

improvements in many public organisations, persistent inefficiencies continue to be reported across both developed and developing administrative systems. This has prompted growing recognition that inefficiency cannot be fully understood through structural and managerial explanations alone (Andrews, 2013).

Contemporary governance literature increasingly argues that organisational behaviour and ethical conduct play a critical role in shaping public sector performance (Kaptein, 2019; Huberts, 2018). Public organisations may possess formal rules, accountability frameworks, digital systems, and performance indicators while still experiencing poor service delivery and administrative dysfunction because employee behaviour, organisational culture, and informal institutional norms undermine effective implementation. As a result, scholars have begun to conceptualise inefficiency not merely as a technical or managerial problem but also as a behavioural governance problem. Within this perspective, misconduct has emerged as an important determinant of organisational underperformance. Misconduct encompasses a wide range of behaviours that violate legal, organisational, or ethical standards, including absenteeism, favouritism, procedural violations, misuse of public resources (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners [ACFE], 2026), conflict of interest, abuse of authority, and selective enforcement of rules (Porto et al., 2024; Treviño et al., 2014). While such behaviours are frequently examined as integrity or corruption concerns, their implications for organisational performance are often underexplored. Misconduct can disrupt workflow coordination, delay administrative processes, weaken accountability, reduce employee morale, and undermine public trust, thereby contributing directly to inefficiency within public institutions (Kaptein, 2019; Huberts and Hoekstra, 2016).

The relationship between misconduct and inefficiency is particularly relevant in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where governance systems frequently operate within environments characterised by small populations, limited institutional capacity, dense social networks, and overlapping political and social relationships (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020). In such contexts, informal networks and relational obligations may intersect with formal administrative structures, creating conditions where misconduct becomes normalised and accountability mechanisms are weakened. Consequently, behavioural governance challenges may have disproportionate effects on public sector performance. The Maldives provides an important context for examining these dynamics. Since the democratic transition of 2008, successive governments have introduced a range of reforms intended to improve public sector accountability, transparency, and efficiency. These initiatives have included civil service reforms, decentralisation programmes, digital governance initiatives, and the strengthening of oversight institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Civil Service Commission (CSC), and National Integrity Commission (NIC) (Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, 2008). Despite these efforts, recurring concerns relating to misconduct and inefficiency continue to emerge within official reports and public discourse.

Evidence from oversight institutions points to persistent problems involving procurement irregularities, favouritism, weak internal controls, misuse of public resources, procedural non-compliance, and abuse of authority within public organisations. Auditor General's Office (AGO) reports have repeatedly identified weaknesses in financial management and administrative compliance (Auditor General's Office, 2026, 2021, 2020), while Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) investigations continue to reveal instances of misconduct affecting institutional performance and

public confidence (ACC, 2025; 2024; 2023). These concerns suggest that inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service may be influenced not only by structural or administrative constraints but also by behavioural and organisational factors (CSC, 2023a; 2023b). Despite increasing recognition of behavioural governance issues, existing studies of public administration in the Maldives have tended to focus on institutional reform, decentralisation, governance capacity, corruption control, and public sector modernisation. Comparatively limited attention has been given to understanding the specific mechanisms through which misconduct contributes to public service inefficiency (Transparency International, 2025). This represents an important gap because reforms targeting structures, procedures, or technology may have limited impact if the behavioural conditions sustaining inefficiency remain unaddressed. Accordingly, this article addresses the following research question: In what ways does misconduct translate into public service inefficiency in terms of administrative processes, service delivery, and organisational performance within the Maldivian Civil Service?

The study specifically seeks to examine how misconduct manifests as a determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. Rather than treating misconduct solely as an ethical or disciplinary issue, the study conceptualises misconduct as a behavioural governance mechanism that contributes directly to organisational inefficiency. The article makes three contributions to the public administration literature. First, it extends behavioural governance scholarship by examining misconduct as a driver of inefficiency rather than merely a violation of integrity standards. Second, it develops an integrated explanatory framework drawing on Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory to explain how relational dynamics, accountability weaknesses, and fairness perceptions contribute to inefficiency. Third, it provides empirical evidence from a Small Island Developing State, thereby contributing to an underrepresented area of governance research. The remainder of the article reviews the literature on public service inefficiency and misconduct, outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework, presents the methodology and findings, and concludes with a discussion of implications for public administration theory and practice.

Literature review

Public service inefficiency

Public service efficiency has long occupied a central position within public administration scholarship because it directly influences state capacity, service quality, citizen satisfaction, and governance legitimacy. Traditionally, efficiency was understood primarily through bureaucratic and managerial perspectives that emphasised rational administration, hierarchical control, procedural standardisation, and resource optimisation. Classical administrative theorists viewed efficiency as the ability of public organisations to achieve intended objectives through orderly coordination and effective utilisation of organisational resources (Weber, 1946). The emergence of New Public Management (NPM) further strengthened the emphasis on efficiency by promoting performance measurement, managerial autonomy, decentralisation, and results-oriented governance (Hood, 1991). Under this perspective, inefficiency was largely interpreted as a consequence of excessive bureaucracy, weak managerial control, procedural rigidity, and poor organisational design. Consequently, many public sector reforms

focused on restructuring institutions, improving performance systems, and enhancing administrative capacity. However, despite extensive reform efforts, public sector inefficiency remains a persistent governance challenge across both developed and developing countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). This persistence has encouraged scholars to move beyond purely structural explanations and examine broader organisational and behavioural influences on performance. Contemporary governance literature increasingly conceptualises inefficiency as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing operational, institutional, and behavioural dimensions (Andrews, 2013).

Operational inefficiency refers to failures in converting resources into effective public services and often manifests through delays, duplication of work, poor coordination, and ineffective service delivery. Institutional inefficiency arises from weaknesses in governance structures, accountability systems, and regulatory arrangements. Behavioural inefficiency, however, originates from employee conduct, organisational culture, and ethical climate that undermine organisational effectiveness despite the existence of formal rules and procedures (Huberts and Hoekstra, 2016). The behavioural perspective is particularly important because public administration depends heavily on discretionary decision-making, professional integrity, and organisational trust (Brezzi et al., 2021). Public organisations may possess adequate resources and formal procedures while remaining inefficient because employee behaviour and informal organisational norms undermine implementation. Consequently, growing attention has been directed toward understanding how misconduct contributes to declining organisational performance and service delivery outcomes.

Misconduct in public organisations

Misconduct within public administration refers to behaviour that violates legal requirements, organisational rules, ethical standards, or professional obligations governing public service conduct (Huberts, 2018). Although corruption often dominates discussions of misconduct, the concept extends beyond criminal wrongdoing to encompass a broader range of organisationally deviant behaviours including absenteeism, favouritism, procedural violations, misuse of public resources, abuse of authority, conflict of interest, and selective enforcement of rules (ACFE, 2026). Public sector misconduct differs from misconduct in private organisations because public officials exercise authority on behalf of citizens and are entrusted with managing public resources in accordance with principles of fairness, impartiality, accountability, and transparency. Consequently, misconduct not only affects organisational performance but also undermines democratic legitimacy and public trust. Scholars increasingly distinguish between major integrity violations and routine forms of organisational deviance (Treviño et al., 2014). While large-scale corruption attracts public attention, everyday misconduct often exerts a more pervasive influence on organisational performance. Routine behaviours such as chronic absenteeism, failure to comply with procedures, favour-based decision-making, and misuse of official time may appear individually insignificant yet collectively impose substantial costs on public institutions.

The literature identifies several categories of misconduct relevant to organisational performance. Production deviance includes behaviours that reduce productivity, such as absenteeism, lateness, and deliberate work avoidance. Procedural misconduct involves bypassing rules, manipulating administrative processes, or selectively applying regulations. Interpersonal misconduct includes abuse of authority, harassment, discrimination, and unethical treatment of colleagues or citizens. Corruption-related

misconduct encompasses bribery, favouritism, embezzlement, patronage, and misuse of public resources (Transparency International, 2025). Importantly, contemporary governance scholarship increasingly argues that misconduct should not be viewed solely as an individual moral failure. Instead, misconduct often reflects broader organisational and institutional conditions that encourage, tolerate, or normalise deviant behaviour. Organisational culture, leadership practices, accountability arrangements, and informal social norms significantly influence how employees interpret ethical expectations and behavioural boundaries (Schein and Schein, 2017). This perspective is reinforced by Vaughan (1999) concept of the normalisation of deviance, which explains how repeated tolerance of misconduct gradually transforms unethical behaviour into accepted organisational practice. Behaviour that initially appears exceptional may become routine when enforcement is inconsistent or organisational culture implicitly accepts rule violations. Over time, misconduct becomes embedded within everyday administrative processes, contributing to broader organisational dysfunction and declining performance. Consequently, understanding public service inefficiency requires attention not only to formal institutional structures but also to the behavioural environments within which public officials operate.

The misconduct–inefficiency nexus

The relationship between misconduct and inefficiency has become increasingly important within behavioural governance research. While misconduct has traditionally been examined through ethical, legal, or anti-corruption perspectives, recent scholarship highlights its organisational consequences and its role in shaping institutional performance (Kaptein, 2019). Misconduct contributes to inefficiency through several interconnected mechanisms. First, it disrupts workflow coordination and administrative continuity. Absenteeism, procedural non-compliance, misuse of official time, and neglect of responsibilities slow organisational processes and create administrative bottlenecks. Because public organisations operate through highly interdependent procedures, delays in one unit frequently generate cascading effects across multiple departments. Second, misconduct contributes to resource leakage and organisational waste. Favouritism, corruption, misuse of public resources, and politically motivated decision-making distort administrative priorities and reduce the effective utilisation of institutional capacity. Public organisations may be required to allocate additional resources toward correcting errors, investigating irregularities, or compensating for poor performance generated by misconduct.

Third, misconduct increases supervisory burden and administrative oversight costs. Managers operating within dysfunctional organisational environments spend considerable time monitoring employee behaviour, resolving procedural failures, and addressing disciplinary concerns rather than focusing on service improvement and strategic organisational development. Fourth, misconduct weakens organisational cohesion and coordination. Employees who perceive favouritism, selective accountability, or tolerated deviance frequently lose confidence in organisational systems. Such conditions encourage reliance on informal networks rather than formal administrative procedures, thereby weakening institutional consistency and collective organisational commitment. The literature further suggests that misconduct contributes to psychological disengagement and organisational withdrawal. Employees who perceive unfair treatment or observe tolerated misconduct often reduce organisational commitment, limit discretionary effort, and disengage from institutional goals (Colquitt

et al., 2001). Such behavioural responses reduce productivity and further weaken organisational effectiveness. Perhaps most significantly, misconduct erodes institutional trust. Trust represents a critical governance resource underpinning cooperation, legitimacy, and organisational effectiveness. When misconduct becomes visible or normalised, citizens may perceive public institutions as unfair, ineffective, or politically compromised, thereby reducing confidence in government and weakening governance legitimacy. The misconduct–inefficiency nexus therefore extends beyond individual wrongdoing. Misconduct functions as a behavioural mechanism that systematically undermines administrative effectiveness, organisational coordination, employee motivation, and public trust.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Governance, and Behavioural Inefficiency

The relationship between misconduct and inefficiency is particularly relevant within Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where governance systems often operate under distinctive institutional and social conditions. SIDS typically possess small populations, limited labour markets, geographically dispersed territories, and dense interpersonal networks that shape administrative behaviour and accountability processes (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020). These characteristics create both strengths and vulnerabilities. Close social relationships may facilitate communication and cooperation; however, they may also blur the boundaries between formal institutional obligations and informal social expectations (Baldacchino, 2018). Public officials frequently operate within environments where professional, political, familial, and community relationships overlap. Such relational proximity may weaken institutional neutrality and increase susceptibility to favouritism, patronage, and selective enforcement of organisational rules. The literature increasingly highlights the importance of relational governance in small-state administrations. Relational governance refers to the influence of informal social networks, reciprocity norms, and interpersonal loyalties on administrative behaviour and decision-making. While relational ties can strengthen social cohesion, they may also create pressures to tolerate misconduct, avoid reporting unethical behaviour, or provide preferential treatment to socially connected individuals.

Limited institutional capacity may further intensify accountability challenges. Small bureaucracies often face difficulties maintaining specialised expertise, conducting independent oversight, and enforcing disciplinary procedures consistently. Consequently, misconduct may be perceived as low-risk behaviour, particularly where accountability mechanisms are fragmented or politically constrained. The Maldivian context reflects many of these characteristics. As a geographically dispersed Small Island Developing State with a relatively small civil service, the Maldives operates within a governance environment where relational networks, political influences, and institutional capacity constraints interact to shape organisational behaviour. Evidence from oversight institutions has repeatedly identified concerns relating to favouritism, procedural irregularities, weak accountability, and misuse of public resources within public organisations (ACC, 2024; Transparency Maldives, 2023). These governance dynamics provide an important context for examining how misconduct contributes to public service inefficiency. Overall, the literature suggests that public service inefficiency cannot be adequately understood through structural explanations alone. Misconduct emerges as a critical behavioural mechanism linking organisational culture, governance arrangements, and employee conduct to declining administrative performance. This study therefore builds on existing scholarship by examining how

misconduct translates into inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service and by identifying the behavioural pathways through which organisational performance is undermined.

Theoretical foundation

This study examines how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. To explain this relationship, the study adopts an integrated theoretical foundation combining Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory. The integration of these theories is necessary because misconduct-driven inefficiency is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical lens. Misconduct within public organisations emerges through the interaction of social relationships, institutional arrangements, accountability systems, and employee perceptions of fairness. Consequently, the three theories provide complementary explanations of the relational, structural, and motivational pathways through which misconduct translates into inefficiency. The theoretical foundation is guided by the central proposition of this article: misconduct is not merely an ethical or disciplinary issue but a behavioural governance mechanism that systematically undermines organisational performance. Social Capital Theory explains how relational networks and loyalty systems shape behaviour within public organisations. Principal–Agent Theory explains how weak monitoring and accountability failures create opportunities for misconduct. Organisational Justice Theory explains how perceptions of unfairness contribute to disengagement, withdrawal behaviour, and declining organisational commitment. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for understanding how misconduct becomes embedded within administrative systems and contributes to inefficiency.

Social Capital Theory: Relational pathways to inefficiency

Social Capital Theory provides an important explanation of how social relationships influence organisational behaviour. Social capital refers to the resources embedded within networks of relationships that facilitate cooperation, trust, reciprocity, and collective action (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988). In public administration, social capital is often associated with positive outcomes such as collaboration, information sharing, and organisational cohesion. However, scholars increasingly recognise that social capital can also generate negative consequences when relational obligations and group loyalties weaken institutional neutrality and accountability. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to strong ties among closely connected individuals, while bridging social capital connects individuals across different groups and social boundaries. Although bonding networks may strengthen solidarity and mutual support, excessive bonding social capital can encourage favouritism, protection of colleagues, conformity to group norms, and tolerance of misconduct. Within public organisations, employees do not operate solely according to formal rules and procedures. Behaviour is also influenced by informal social networks, interpersonal obligations, and expectations of reciprocity. Where strong relational ties exist, employees may prioritise loyalty to colleagues, friends, family members, or political associates over formal organisational obligations.

Under such conditions, misconduct may be tolerated because enforcing accountability risks disrupting social relationships and informal support networks.

The relevance of Social Capital Theory is particularly evident in small-state governance environments. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) often possess dense interpersonal networks in which professional, familial, political, and community relationships overlap (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020). Such relational proximity can create governance challenges because formal institutional obligations frequently intersect with informal social expectations. Employees may feel pressure to protect colleagues, overlook procedural violations, or avoid reporting misconduct involving socially connected individuals. From the perspective of this study, Social Capital Theory explains how relational governance contributes to the normalisation of misconduct within public administration. Informal protection systems, loyalty obligations, and reciprocity norms may reduce the effectiveness of formal accountability mechanisms and encourage adaptation to organisational deviance. As misconduct becomes socially tolerated, organisational discipline weakens and inefficiency becomes increasingly embedded within administrative practice. The theory therefore provides an important explanation of the relational pathways linking misconduct to inefficiency. Favouritism, selective accountability, and reliance on informal networks undermine procedural consistency, organisational coordination, and meritocratic decision-making. Over time, these behaviours contribute to workflow disruption, reduced institutional effectiveness, and declining public confidence in government institutions.

Principal-Agent Theory: Structural pathways to inefficiency

While Social Capital Theory focuses on relational influences, Principal–Agent Theory explains how institutional structures and accountability arrangements create opportunities for misconduct. Originally developed within economics and organisational theory, Principal–Agent Theory examines relationships in which one party (the principal) delegates authority to another party (the agent) (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). In public administration, principals may include citizens, elected officials, oversight institutions, and organisational leaders, while agents include public officials responsible for implementing policies and delivering services. The theory assumes that agents may pursue interests that diverge from those of principals, particularly where monitoring systems are weak and information is unevenly distributed. A central concept within Principal–Agent Theory is information asymmetry. Public officials often possess greater knowledge regarding organisational processes and implementation activities than supervisors or oversight bodies. This informational advantage creates opportunities for misconduct because principals may be unable to fully monitor employee behaviour or verify compliance with organisational expectations. Consequently, employees may engage in opportunistic behaviour without immediate detection.

The theory further suggests that misconduct becomes more likely when accountability systems are fragmented or enforcement mechanisms lack credibility. Public organisations frequently operate within complex governance environments characterised by multiple oversight bodies, overlapping authority structures, and diffuse responsibility. Under such conditions, disciplinary enforcement may become inconsistent and organisational expectations unclear. Politicisation further intensifies principal–agent problems within public administration. Where recruitment, promotion,

resource allocation, or disciplinary processes are influenced by political considerations, accountability systems become weakened and organisational neutrality is compromised. Employees may perceive loyalty to political actors or influential networks as more important than professional performance or ethical compliance (Gauld, 2007). Principal–Agent Theory therefore provides a structural explanation for misconduct-driven inefficiency. Weak monitoring systems, fragmented oversight arrangements, and inconsistent disciplinary enforcement reduce deterrence against misconduct and create opportunities for opportunistic behaviour. As misconduct persists, organisations experience increased supervisory burden, procedural inconsistency, duplication of effort, and declining performance. Within the Maldivian Civil Service, concerns regarding politicisation, weak enforcement, and accountability challenges have been repeatedly identified in institutional reports and governance assessments. Consequently, Principal–Agent Theory offers a useful framework for understanding how institutional weaknesses enable misconduct and contribute to inefficiency within public administration.

Organisational Justice Theory: Motivational pathways to inefficiency

Organisational Justice Theory explains how employee perceptions of fairness influence behaviour, motivation, and organisational commitment. The theory argues that individuals evaluate organisational systems according to their perceptions of fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment (Greenberg, 1990). The literature identifies three dimensions of organisational justice. Distributive justice concerns perceived fairness regarding organisational outcomes such as rewards, promotions, workload allocation, and access to opportunities. Procedural justice refers to the fairness of organisational processes and decision-making systems. Interactional justice relates to the quality of interpersonal treatment and communication within organisational relationships. Employees who perceive organisational systems as fair are generally more likely to demonstrate commitment, cooperation, and compliance with organisational expectations. Conversely, perceptions of injustice often generate dissatisfaction, disengagement, and withdrawal behaviour (Colquitt et al., 2001). Employees may reduce effort, avoid discretionary contributions, disengage from organisational goals, or rationalise deviant behaviour as a response to perceived unfair treatment.

Within public administration, perceptions of favouritism, politicised recruitment, inconsistent disciplinary enforcement, and unequal access to opportunities can significantly weaken organisational commitment. Employees may perceive that performance and professionalism are not rewarded fairly, thereby reducing motivation and confidence in organisational systems (Schein and Schein, 2017). Organisational Justice Theory therefore provides an important explanation of the motivational pathways linking misconduct to inefficiency. Perceived injustice contributes to withdrawal behaviour, declining morale, reduced productivity, and weakened collaboration. Employees operating within environments characterised by favouritism and selective accountability may disengage psychologically from organisational goals and become increasingly tolerant of misconduct. In this study, Organisational Justice Theory complements Social Capital Theory and Principal–Agent Theory by explaining how organisational behaviour is shaped not only by relational networks and institutional structures but also by employee perceptions and motivational responses. Misconduct-

driven inefficiency is therefore understood partly as a consequence of declining organisational commitment arising from perceived unfairness within public institutions.

Integrated Theoretical Foundation

Although each theory provides valuable insight independently, no single theory fully explains how misconduct translates into public service inefficiency. The integration of Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of the behavioural governance processes examined in this study. Social Capital Theory explains the relational pathways through which loyalty networks, reciprocity norms, and informal protection systems normalise misconduct and weaken institutional neutrality. Principal–Agent Theory explains the structural pathways through which weak monitoring, politicisation, information asymmetry, and fragmented accountability enable misconduct to persist. Organisational Justice Theory explains the motivational pathways through which perceived unfairness generates withdrawal behaviour, disengagement, and declining organisational commitment. Together, the three theories suggest that misconduct emerges from the interaction of relational, structural, and psychological factors operating within public organisations. Misconduct is sustained by social networks that discourage accountability, institutional arrangements that weaken oversight, and organisational conditions that reduce employee commitment.

These factors collectively contribute to workflow disruption, resource leakage, organisational fragmentation, supervisory overload, declining morale, and erosion of public trust. Accordingly, the integrated theoretical foundation conceptualises misconduct as a behavioural governance mechanism linking organisational conditions to public service inefficiency. This framework, as illustrated in figure 1, provides the analytical basis for examining how misconduct becomes translated into declining organisational performance within the Maldivian Civil Service (*Figure 1*). The framework integrates Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory to explain how relational, structural, and motivational factors contribute to misconduct and ultimately generate public service inefficiency. This integrated framework is explained extensively, in *Table 1*, with the key concepts and relevance to the study with expected influence on inefficiency. The integrated theoretical framework explains misconduct-driven inefficiency through relational, structural, and motivational pathways operating simultaneously within public organisations.

***Table 1**. Integrated theoretical foundation of misconduct-driven public service inefficiency.*

Theory	Key Concepts	Relevance to the Study	Expected Influence on Inefficiency
Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988)	Bonding social capital, reciprocity, loyalty networks, trust, social norms	Explains how dense social relationships and informal networks influence employee behaviour and accountability within the Maldivian Civil Service	Encourages favouritism, informal protection systems, selective accountability, and tolerance of misconduct
Principal–Agent Theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976)	Information asymmetry, moral hazard, weak monitoring, accountability failure, opportunism	Explains how weak oversight and fragmented accountability create opportunities for misconduct	Enables procedural violations, misuse of authority, resource misuse, and organisational inefficiency
Organisational Justice Theory (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990)	Distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice,	Explains employee responses to perceived unfairness within organisational systems	Contributes to disengagement, withdrawal behaviour, reduced motivation, and declining productivity

	fairness perceptions

Source: Putnam (1993); Coleman (1988); Jensen and Meckling (1976); Greenberg (1990); Colquitt et al. (2001).

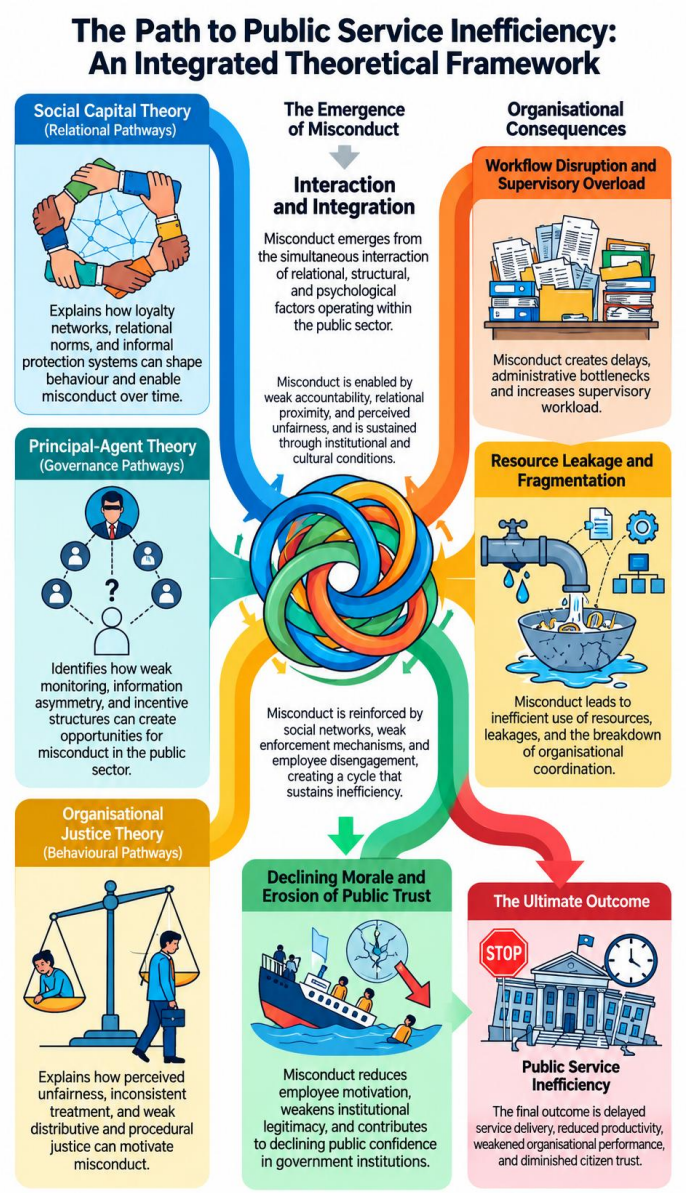


Figure 1. *Integrated theoretical framework of misconduct-driven public service inefficiency.*

Conceptual framework

This study conceptualises misconduct as the central behavioural mechanism through which organisational, institutional, and contextual conditions generate public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. While existing public administration literature frequently examines misconduct as an ethical, legal, or integrity-related issue, this study argues that misconduct should also be understood as a governance mechanism that directly influences organisational performance. The conceptual framework therefore focuses on explaining how misconduct becomes translated into inefficiency through a series of interconnected organisational processes. The framework is derived

from the integrated theoretical foundation comprising Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory. Collectively, these theories suggest that misconduct emerges from the interaction of relational governance, accountability weaknesses, and employee perceptions of organisational fairness. Rather than viewing inefficiency solely as a consequence of structural deficiencies, the framework proposes that organisational behaviour mediates the relationship between governance conditions and organisational outcomes. The first component of the framework consists of organisational, institutional, and contextual conditions that create opportunities for misconduct.

Organisational conditions include weak human resource management systems, inconsistent disciplinary enforcement, poor ethical leadership, and dysfunctional organisational cultures. Institutional conditions include weak accountability mechanisms, fragmented oversight systems, information asymmetry, and politicisation of administrative processes. Contextual conditions reflect characteristics associated with Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including dense social networks, relational proximity, reciprocity norms, and informal protection systems. These antecedent conditions influence the second component of the framework, namely misconduct behaviour. Misconduct is conceptualised broadly to include absenteeism, favouritism, procedural violations, misuse of public resources, abuse of authority, selective compliance, and organisational withdrawal. The framework treats misconduct not as isolated acts of wrongdoing but as patterns of behaviour embedded within organisational systems and institutional practices. The third component represents the core analytical contribution of the study by identifying the mechanisms through which misconduct generates inefficiency. The findings suggest that misconduct contributes to workflow disruption, administrative bottlenecks, duplication of work, supervisory overload, resource leakage, coordination failure, declining morale, psychological disengagement, reduced compliance, and erosion of institutional trust. These mechanisms collectively weaken organisational effectiveness and administrative performance. The final component consists of public service inefficiency outcomes. These outcomes include delayed service delivery, reduced productivity, inconsistent implementation of policies and procedures, weakened organisational performance, declining institutional legitimacy, and reduced citizen trust.

The framework further recognises a reinforcing feedback effect whereby persistent inefficiency weakens accountability systems and contributes to the normalisation of misconduct, thereby perpetuating a cycle of organisational dysfunction. Accordingly, the conceptual framework, as illustrated in *Figure 2*, provides a structured explanation of how misconduct operates as a behavioural governance mechanism linking organisational conditions to public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. The conceptual framework illustrates how organisational, institutional, and contextual conditions lead by the theoretical foundation creates opportunities for misconduct, which subsequently generates inefficiency through multiple organisational mechanisms that collectively produce inefficiency outcomes. The model further highlights a reinforcing feedback loop whereby inefficiency contributes to the normalisation of misconduct. *Table 2* further demonstrates the mechanics through which misconduct can be translated into public service inefficiency. The table summarises the principal behavioural pathways identified through interview and documentary analysis.

***Table 2**. Mechanisms through which misconduct translates into public service inefficiency.*

Forms of Misconduct	Organisational Mechanism	Public Service Inefficiency Outcome
Absenteeism and misuse of official time	Workflow disruption and delayed task completion	Administrative delays and reduced service responsiveness
Procedural violations and non-compliance	Administrative bottlenecks and repeated corrective action	Reduced operational efficiency and implementation delays
Favouritism and politically influenced decisions	Distortion of merit-based processes and weakened organisational coordination	Reduced competence, productivity, and organisational effectiveness
Misuse of public resources	Resource leakage and inefficient allocation of institutional capacity	Increased organisational costs and reduced service capability
Weak accountability and selective enforcement	Normalisation of deviance and reduced deterrence	Persistence of misconduct and declining organisational discipline
Organisational injustice	Employee withdrawal and psychological disengagement	Reduced motivation, productivity, and commitment
Informal influence networks	Organisational fragmentation and reliance on non-formal processes	Inconsistent implementation and weakened institutional coordination
Tolerated misconduct	Erosion of trust and organisational legitimacy	Reduced employee confidence and declining public trust

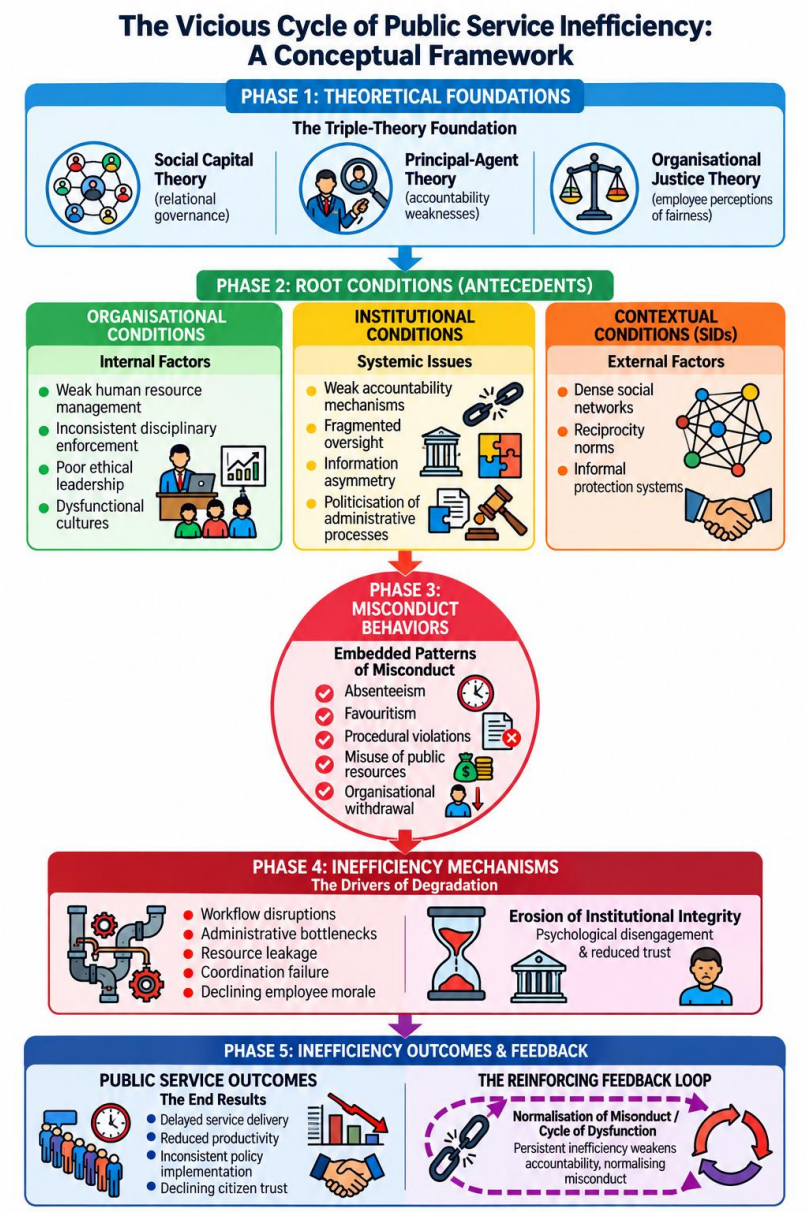


***Figure 2.** Conceptual framework of misconduct-driven public service inefficiency.*

Materials and Methods

This study examines how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. The research seeks to understand the organisational processes and governance dynamics through which misconduct contributes to declining administrative performance, service delivery challenges, and institutional effectiveness. Given the study's focus on behavioural experiences, organisational meanings, and governance practices, a qualitative methodological approach (Creswell and Poth, 2018) was adopted. The methodology was designed to explore how public officials perceive, experience, and interpret misconduct within their organisational environments and how such behaviour translates into inefficiency. This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, analytical procedures, trustworthiness strategies, and ethical considerations underpinning the study.

Research design

Qualitative case study and case selection

The study employed a qualitative single-case study design focusing on the Maldivian Civil Service. Case study methodology is appropriate when research seeks an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). Misconduct and inefficiency are embedded within organisational structures, governance arrangements, and institutional cultures, making a case study approach particularly suitable. The case study design enabled detailed examination of the behavioural mechanisms linking misconduct to inefficiency and allowed consideration of the broader organisational and governance environment within which these processes occur. The Maldivian Civil Service was selected as a critical single case because of its analytical significance as a public administration system operating within a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). The Maldives presents a context characterised by relatively small administrative structures, dense interpersonal networks, geographic dispersion, and ongoing public sector reform efforts. These characteristics create conditions where relational governance, accountability systems, and organisational culture may significantly influence employee behaviour and institutional performance. The case therefore provides an opportunity to examine how misconduct-driven inefficiency emerges within a small-state governance environment. The objective of the study is not statistical generalisation but analytical generalisation. The findings contribute to broader theoretical understanding of behavioural governance and public sector inefficiency while remaining grounded in the Maldivian context.

Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with civil servants possessing experience relevant to public administration processes and organisational behaviour. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide sufficient structure to address the research question while allowing participants flexibility to discuss organisational experiences in depth. Interview questions focused on experiences of misconduct, accountability systems, organisational fairness, behavioural responses, administrative performance, and perceptions of inefficiency. Purposive sampling was

used to identify participants with knowledge and experience relevant to the study. Participants were drawn from different organisational levels and administrative functions to capture a range of perspectives on misconduct and inefficiency within the civil service. Interviews continued until thematic saturation was achieved, meaning additional interviews yielded no substantially new insights relevant to the research objectives. To complement interview data, documentary analysis was undertaken. Documentary sources included Auditor General's Office reports, Anti-Corruption Commission reports, Civil Service Commission regulations and reports, government policy documents, disciplinary regulations, governance assessments, and official reports concerning public administration and accountability. Documentary analysis served two purposes. First, it provided contextual understanding of governance structures and accountability mechanisms within the Maldivian Civil Service. Second, it enabled triangulation of participant narratives with institutional evidence relating to misconduct, procedural non-compliance, and organisational inefficiency.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The analysis proceeded through six stages: Familiarisation with the data; Initial coding; Theme development; Theme review; Theme definition and refinement; and Interpretation and synthesis. The process began with repeated reading of interview transcripts and documentary materials to gain familiarity with the data. Initial open coding was then undertaken to identify recurring concepts, behaviours, organisational experiences, and governance issues relevant to misconduct and inefficiency. Codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes. Particular attention was given to identifying the mechanisms through which misconduct contributed to inefficiency. Themes emerging from the analysis included workflow disruption, resource misuse, supervisory burden, organisational fragmentation, employee disengagement, weak accountability, and trust erosion. The analysis combined inductive and deductive strategies. While themes emerged from participant narratives and documentary evidence, interpretation was informed by the integrated theoretical framework comprising Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory. This approach enabled both empirical grounding and theoretical explanation. The final stage involved synthesising findings into a coherent explanation of how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service.

Trustworthiness and rigour

To enhance the quality and credibility of the research, the study adopted the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation using both interviews and documentary evidence. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of research procedures, coding decisions, and analytical processes. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive engagement with the data and maintenance of an audit trail throughout the study. Transferability was supported through detailed description of the Maldivian

governance context, enabling readers to assess the relevance of findings to similar public administration environments. Together, these strategies enhanced the rigour and transparency of the research process.

Ethical considerations

Given the sensitivity of discussing misconduct and organisational inefficiency within public institutions, careful attention was paid to ethical considerations throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and all identifying information was removed during transcription and reporting. Data were securely stored and accessed only for research purposes. Particular care was taken to ensure that participation did not expose respondents to professional, organisational, or personal risk. The study adhered to accepted ethical principles of respect for persons, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and responsible research conduct. These safeguards were essential given the governance-related nature of the inquiry and the potential sensitivity of participant experiences concerning misconduct and accountability within the public service.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that misconduct contributes to public service inefficiency through a series of interconnected organisational and behavioural mechanisms as summarised in *Table 3*. As summarised, the themes emerged through thematic analysis of interview data and documentary evidence and represent the principal mechanisms through which misconduct contributes to public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. Across interviews and documentary evidence, participants consistently described misconduct not as isolated incidents of unethical behaviour but as recurring organisational practices that undermine administrative performance, disrupt service delivery, and weaken institutional effectiveness. Six interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: workflow disruption, resource misuse, supervisory burden, organisational fragmentation, employee disengagement, and weak accountability. *Figure 3* illustrates the interrelated themes of misconduct identified as behavioural pathways linked to public service inefficiency. The figure summarises the principal pathways identified through interview and documentary analysis. Different forms of misconduct contribute to inefficiency through specific organisational mechanisms, collectively producing reduced administrative effectiveness and service delivery performance.

***Table 3**. Summary of empirical findings.*

Theme	Evidence from Interviews	Evidence from Documentary Analysis
Workflow disruption and administrative delays	Participants reported absenteeism, delayed task completion, unattended files, and procedural non-compliance causing bottlenecks across departments	Audit reports identified delays in implementation, procedural weaknesses, and weak internal controls
Resource misuse and organisational waste	Respondents described favouritism, politically influenced appointments, and misuse of institutional resources reducing organisational effectiveness	Oversight reports documented procurement irregularities, financial management weaknesses, and non-compliance with administrative procedures
Supervisory burden and corrective administration	Managers reported spending substantial time monitoring attendance, correcting errors, and addressing recurring behavioural issues	Institutional reports identified recurring governance failures requiring repeated administrative intervention
Organisational fragmentation and	Participants described reliance on informal networks, favouritism, and declining trust among	Governance reports highlighted coordination weaknesses and procedural inconsistencies

reduced coordination	employees	across institutions
Employee disengagement and declining motivation	Respondents linked favouritism and inconsistent treatment to reduced morale, initiative, and organisational commitment	Public sector assessments identified concerns regarding employee motivation and organisational culture
Weak accountability and persistence of misconduct	Participants reported inconsistent disciplinary action and perceptions that misconduct carried limited consequences	ACC, CSC, and AGO reports repeatedly identified procedural non-compliance, weak enforcement, and accountability deficiencies
Erosion of institutional trust	Employees expressed declining confidence in organisational systems and accountability mechanisms	Governance and integrity reports highlighted declining public confidence in institutional effectiveness and accountability

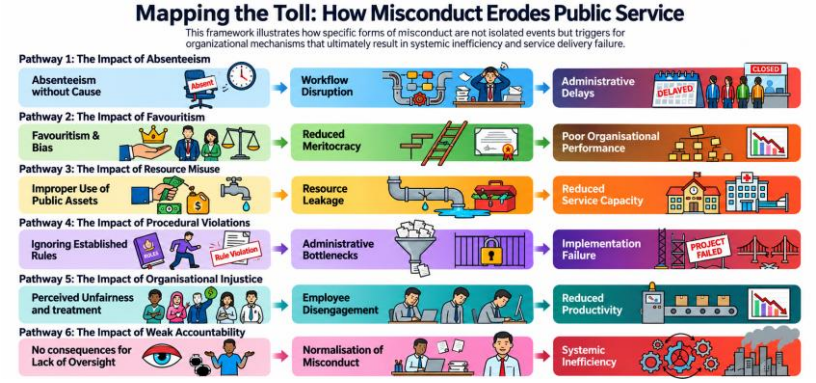


Figure 3. *Behavioural pathways linking misconduct to public service inefficiency.*

Workflow disruption and administrative delays

The most frequently reported consequence of misconduct was disruption of routine administrative processes. Participants described absenteeism, misuse of official time, delayed task completion, and procedural non-compliance as common behaviours affecting organisational performance. Respondents indicated that files frequently remained unattended, approvals were delayed, and administrative responsibilities were postponed beyond required timelines. Such behaviours created bottlenecks across departments because many organisational processes depended on the timely completion of preceding tasks. Several participants noted that workflow disruption had become normalised within some organisational settings. Delays were often perceived as routine rather than exceptional, resulting in reduced expectations regarding timeliness and accountability. Documentary evidence similarly identified recurring concerns relating to procedural delays, weak internal controls, and ineffective implementation practices within public institutions. These findings suggest that routine misconduct contributes directly to inefficiency by slowing organisational processes and reducing service responsiveness.

Resource misuse and organisational waste

Participants consistently identified misuse of public resources as a significant source of inefficiency. Interviewees referred to favouritism, politically influenced appointments, irregular use of government resources, and procedural manipulation as practices that weakened organisational effectiveness. Several respondents argued that favour-based recruitment and promotion decisions frequently resulted in individuals being placed in positions without the necessary competence or experience, increasing dependency on a limited number of capable employees. Participants further explained that misuse of resources often generated additional organisational costs because institutions were required to correct errors, repeat procedures, and allocate resources

toward addressing irregularities. Documentary evidence supported these observations, highlighting procurement irregularities, financial management weaknesses, and non-compliance with administrative procedures. The findings indicate that misconduct contributes to inefficiency not only through direct resource losses but also through the reduced effectiveness of organisational capacity and decision-making processes.

Supervisory burden and corrective administration

Another prominent theme concerned the additional supervisory burden generated by misconduct. Participants reported that managers frequently spent considerable time monitoring attendance, resolving procedural failures, and addressing behavioural issues. Rather than focusing on strategic planning, service improvement, or organisational development, supervisors were often required to maintain basic operational continuity by repeatedly correcting errors and following up on neglected responsibilities. Several respondents observed that weak disciplinary enforcement contributed to the recurrence of misconduct, creating a cycle in which managers repeatedly addressed the same behavioural issues without achieving lasting organisational improvement. As a result, significant organisational effort was redirected toward corrective administration rather than productive service delivery activities.

Organisational fragmentation and reduced coordination

The findings also revealed that misconduct weakened organisational cohesion and coordination. Participants frequently associated favouritism, selective enforcement of rules, and informal influence networks with declining trust among employees. Several respondents indicated that organisational decisions were sometimes perceived to be influenced by personal relationships or political considerations rather than formal procedures. Under such conditions, employees increasingly relied on informal networks to navigate administrative processes. Participants reported that this weakened collaboration between organisational units and contributed to duplication of work, communication breakdowns, and inconsistent implementation of procedures. Consequently, misconduct undermined organisational coordination and reduced the overall effectiveness of administrative operations.

Employee disengagement and declining motivation

A significant finding concerned the relationship between perceived organisational unfairness and employee disengagement. Participants repeatedly linked favouritism, unequal treatment, and inconsistent disciplinary practices to declining morale and reduced organisational commitment. Several respondents stated that employees became less motivated when professional performance and ethical conduct were not perceived to be recognised or rewarded fairly. This disengagement manifested in behaviours such as reduced initiative, absenteeism, avoidance of responsibility, and limited commitment to organisational goals. Participants explained that employees often restricted their efforts to minimum job requirements because they believed that performance had little influence on organisational outcomes. Such withdrawal behaviour contributed directly to reduced productivity and weakened institutional effectiveness.

Weak accountability and the persistence of misconduct

The final theme concerned the role of weak accountability systems in sustaining misconduct and inefficiency. Participants consistently reported that disciplinary processes were often perceived as inconsistent, delayed, or influenced by relational and political considerations. Several respondents indicated that employees frequently believed misconduct would not result in meaningful consequences, particularly where individuals possessed strong social or political connections. As a result, misconduct was often viewed as low-risk behaviour. Repeated exposure to unaddressed misconduct contributed to its normalisation within organisational culture and weakened confidence in accountability mechanisms. Documentary evidence similarly identified recurring concerns regarding procedural non-compliance, weak enforcement, and governance irregularities within public institutions. These findings suggest that weak accountability not only permits misconduct to continue but also reinforces the organisational conditions that produce inefficiency. Overall, the findings demonstrate that misconduct contributes to public service inefficiency through multiple interconnected pathways. Rather than operating as isolated acts of individual wrongdoing, misconduct functions as a systemic organisational phenomenon that disrupts workflow, wastes resources, increases supervisory burdens, weakens coordination, reduces employee commitment, and undermines accountability within the Maldivian Civil Service.

Misconduct and behavioural inefficiency

The purpose of this study was to examine how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. The findings demonstrate that misconduct contributes to inefficiency through multiple organisational mechanisms, including workflow disruption, resource misuse, supervisory burden, organisational fragmentation, employee disengagement, and weak accountability. Collectively, these findings support the central argument of the study that inefficiency within public administration is not solely a structural or managerial problem but also a behavioural governance problem. A key finding of the study is that routine forms of misconduct contribute directly to administrative inefficiency by disrupting workflow continuity and organisational performance. Participants consistently associated absenteeism, procedural non-compliance, misuse of official time, and delayed task completion with administrative bottlenecks and reduced service responsiveness. This finding supports contemporary behavioural governance literature, which argues that organisational performance is influenced not only by formal structures and procedures but also by employee behaviour and workplace norms (Kaptein, 2019; Huberts, 2018). The findings further support Vaughan's (1999) concept of the normalisation of deviance. Participants described environments where delays, procedural shortcuts, and non-compliance had become routine organisational practices rather than exceptional events. As misconduct became normalised, expectations regarding accountability and performance weakened, allowing inefficiency to become embedded within everyday administrative processes. This suggests that public service inefficiency may persist despite structural reforms when behavioural practices remain unchanged.

Relational governance and social capital

The findings also highlight the importance of relational governance in shaping organisational behaviour within the Maldivian Civil Service. Participants frequently

referred to favouritism, informal influence, and relationship-based decision-making as factors contributing to inefficiency. These findings are consistent with Social Capital Theory, particularly its recognition that bonding social capital can generate negative outcomes when loyalty obligations and interpersonal networks override formal institutional rules (Putnam, 1993). While social networks may facilitate cooperation and trust, the findings suggest that excessive reliance on informal relationships can weaken meritocratic decision-making and institutional neutrality. Employees reported that organisational opportunities and administrative decisions were sometimes influenced by personal or political connections rather than formal procedures. Such practices contributed to organisational fragmentation, reduced trust, and weakened coordination across departments. The findings also reflect governance challenges commonly identified in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where dense interpersonal networks and overlapping social relationships often influence public administration (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020). In the Maldivian context, relational governance appears to create conditions where misconduct may be tolerated or insufficiently challenged, thereby contributing to organisational inefficiency.

Weak accountability and Principal–Agent problems

Another important finding concerns the role of weak accountability systems in sustaining misconduct and inefficiency. Participants repeatedly described disciplinary enforcement as inconsistent, delayed, or influenced by political and relational considerations. This finding strongly supports Principal–Agent Theory, which argues that misconduct becomes more likely when monitoring systems are weak, information asymmetries exist, and sanctions lack credibility (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). The findings indicate that employees often perceived misconduct as low-risk behaviour because disciplinary consequences were uncertain or inconsistently applied. Under such conditions, organisational incentives favour opportunistic behaviour rather than compliance with formal rules. Documentary evidence showing recurring procedural irregularities and governance concerns further supports this interpretation. Importantly, the findings suggest that accountability weaknesses do not merely permit misconduct; they also contribute to inefficiency by increasing supervisory burden and corrective administrative work. Managers were required to devote substantial time to monitoring, follow-up, and problem resolution rather than strategic organisational development. This demonstrates how accountability failures translate into operational inefficiency within public institutions.

Organisational justice and employee withdrawal

The relationship between perceived organisational unfairness and employee disengagement emerged as another significant pathway linking misconduct to inefficiency. Participants consistently associated favouritism, unequal treatment, and inconsistent disciplinary practices with declining morale and reduced organisational commitment. These findings align closely with Organisational Justice Theory, which proposes that perceptions of distributive and procedural injustice influence employee motivation and workplace behaviour (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990). Employees who believe organisational systems are unfair are less likely to demonstrate commitment, initiative, or discretionary effort. Instead, they may withdraw psychologically from organisational goals and limit their contributions to minimum

requirements. The findings suggest that misconduct affects organisational performance not only through direct behavioural disruption but also through its indirect impact on employee attitudes and motivation. As perceptions of injustice increase, organisational commitment declines, contributing to reduced productivity and weakened institutional effectiveness.

Overall contribution: Misconduct as a behavioural governance mechanism

Taken together, the findings support the study's central proposition that misconduct should be understood as a behavioural governance mechanism rather than merely an ethical or disciplinary concern. The integrated theoretical framework demonstrates that misconduct is sustained through the interaction of relational networks, accountability weaknesses, and perceptions of organisational injustice. These conditions collectively contribute to workflow disruption, resource inefficiency, organisational fragmentation, and declining employee commitment. The study therefore extends existing public administration literature by demonstrating that misconduct is not simply a consequence of inefficiency but an important cause of inefficiency. Improving public service performance consequently requires attention not only to institutional reforms and administrative systems but also to the behavioural and organisational conditions that sustain misconduct within public administration (*Figure 4*).

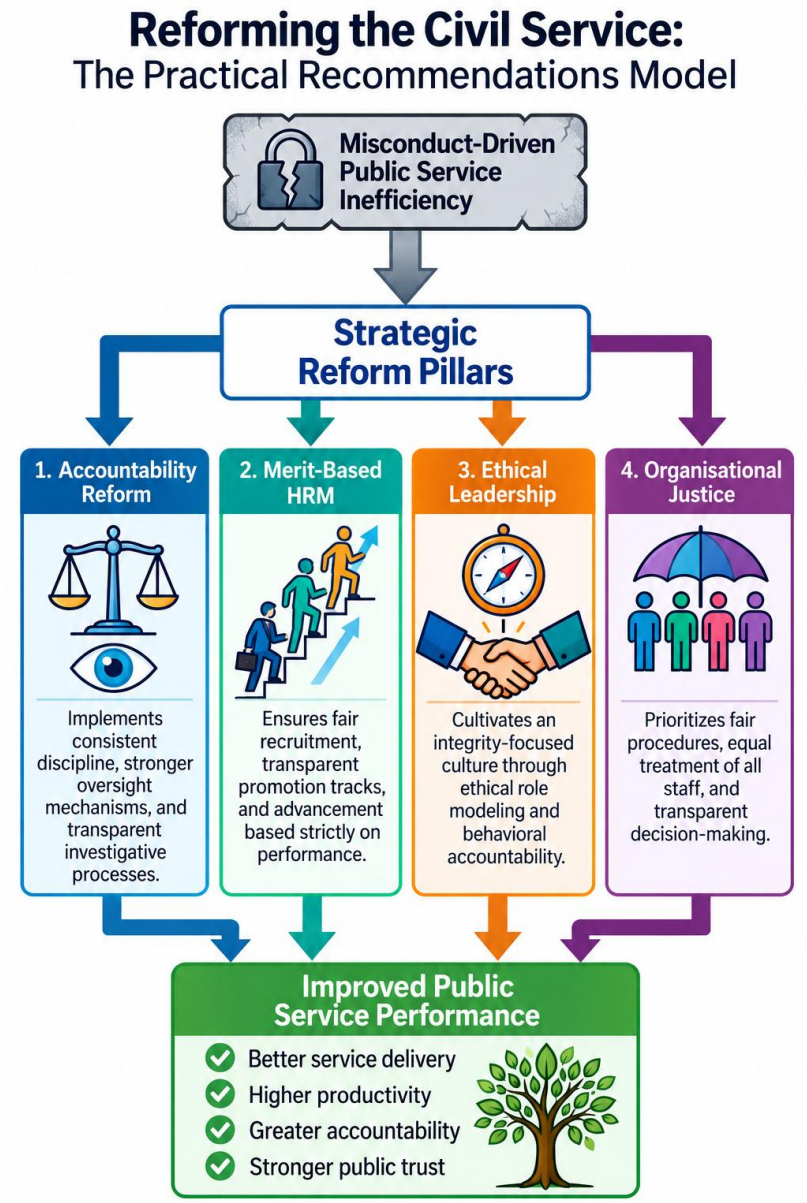


Figure 4. *Recommendations model for reducing misconduct-driven inefficiency.*

Conclusion

This study examined how misconduct functions as a behavioural determinant of public service inefficiency within the Maldivian Civil Service. Specifically, it sought to explain the mechanisms through which misconduct translates into inefficiency in administrative processes, organisational performance, and service delivery. The findings demonstrate that the research objective was achieved by identifying multiple pathways through which misconduct contributes to inefficiency, including workflow disruption, resource misuse, supervisory burden, organisational fragmentation, employee disengagement, and weak accountability. Further, based on findings, a practical recommendation model, as in the *Figure 4*, to reform the Civil Service is proposed to reduce misconduct driven inefficiency in public service. The model presents the principal reform areas identified by the study. Strengthening accountability, merit-based

human resource management, ethical leadership, and organisational justice is expected to reduce misconduct and improve organisational performance within the Maldivian Civil Service. The study concludes that misconduct should not be viewed solely as an ethical or disciplinary problem. Rather, misconduct functions as a behavioural governance mechanism that systematically undermines organisational effectiveness (Kaptein, 2019; Huberts, 2018). The findings indicate that inefficiency emerges not only from structural or procedural weaknesses but also from behavioural practices embedded within organisational culture and governance systems. Relational governance, inconsistent accountability, politicisation, and perceived organisational injustice collectively create conditions that enable misconduct and weaken administrative performance (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020; Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990; Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, accountability mechanisms should be strengthened through consistent enforcement of disciplinary procedures, transparent investigations, and credible sanctions for misconduct. Second, public institutions should reinforce merit-based recruitment, promotion, and performance management systems to reduce favouritism and political influence within administrative processes. Third, greater emphasis should be placed on ethical leadership and integrity management to promote organisational cultures that encourage accountability, professionalism, and compliance with public service values (Kaptein, 2019; Huberts, 2018). Fourth, organisational justice should be strengthened through fair and transparent decision-making processes, equitable treatment of employees, and consistent application of organisational rules, thereby reducing disengagement and improving organisational commitment (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990). The study contributes to public administration scholarship by advancing understanding of misconduct as a behavioural driver of inefficiency, particularly within a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) context. It further demonstrates the value of integrating Social Capital Theory, Principal–Agent Theory, and Organisational Justice Theory in explaining governance-related inefficiency (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 1993; Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990; Coleman, 1988; Jensen and Meckling, 1976). Future research could extend this work through comparative studies across different public sector organisations or SIDS jurisdictions to examine the transferability of the findings. Quantitative research may also be undertaken to test the relationships identified in this study and measure the impact of specific forms of misconduct on organisational performance. Additionally, future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of accountability, ethics, and organisational justice interventions in reducing misconduct and improving public service efficiency.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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